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Testimony to the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee
For Senate Bill # 1135: An Act Establishing a Sustainable Path for Maintaining the Budget Reserve Fund and Reducing the Effect of Revenue Volatility on the State Budget

April 23, 2015

Dear Members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee,

My name is Alicia Draughn and I live in New Haven. I am here to encourage you to do everything you can to strengthen our state budget by both increasing revenue now and providing more stability for future budgets with bills such as Bill #1135.

I have been a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) for 9 years. I work in a nursing home that, like most nursing homes, is primarily funded by the state with Medicaid dollars.

Everyone agrees that the care we provide to elderly nursing home residents is so important. Which is why I don't understand how we are paid so little money to provide this care. I've been working for three years at my current position, and I have nearly a decade of experience, but I still don't even make \$15 an hour. I work full-time, but it isn't enough to pay my basic living expenses. I have to cash out my vacation time just to pay my bills. I struggle over what other people consider the basics, like trying to keep the lights on, trying not to lose my car insurance coverage, or arranging a payment plan with the gas company. Every month my cell phone gets cut off.

It makes me sad to think that I do so much for my residents, but it's only on a rare special occasion that my kids get to have ice cream or see a movie. They think it's a huge reward.

I'm a Certified Nursing Assistant because I love to take care of people. I'm a single mother and taking care of people is a big part of who I am. I take joy in knowing that when I take care of people they'll be getting the care they deserve.

Providing nursing home care is extremely strenuous and takes a real toll on our bodies. We frequently have 10-13 residents on our assignment to bathe, feed, and dress. I need to help them sit up, to turn them so they don't develop bedsores, to move them from their beds to their chairs. I've been injured multiple times due to the strain put on my body.

It's difficult, because no matter how emotionally stressed or physically tired we are, we have to leave that room and go into each patient's room with a smile as if our day is just beginning.

But while I may look like I'm smiling, I am crying on the inside. I - and the thousands of other low-paid caregivers - need your help. We are asking you to raise the revenue needed for the state budget so we can be paid a fair wage and take care of our families while also taking care of Connecticut's elderly.